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## Preserve seniors' benefits

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The state's 200,000 low-income senior citizens could be worse off when the new prescription drug coverage under Medicare starts next year if they are forced out of the state's Pharmaceutical Access for the Aged and Disabled program and into a private Medicare plan.

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To prevent that from happening, Sens. Jon S. Corzine and Frank R. Lautenberg, both D-N.J., have introduced a bill with the same PAAD initials, the Preserving Access to Affordable Drugs Act. It would allow seniors enrolled in the state PAAD, Senior Gold or other state pharmacy assistance program to remain there. Rep. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., is sponsoring the House version.

The state PAAD is more generous than the federal model. Those in the state program pay only \$5 per prescription and can choose from a host of brand-name drugs. The state's senators don't expect the per-prescription cost to be that low under Medicare and say the list of available drugs will likely be shorter.

The proposed law would also allow states to pay the difference in the cost of drugs that senior citizens and the disabled now get under Medicaid but won't be covered by the new Medicare program.

Allowing states to administer programs is something the Bush administration usually pushes. The Democrats' bill would let states go further than the federal government in providing for their older citizens. That approach deserves bipartisan support.

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